Is it Monday, Yet? is my once monthly attempt to address developmental and topical issues we confront as we "challenge and nurture" our children. The topics I cover will be drawn from developmental and cognitive psychology, current research, and my own parenting and school administrator experience, and could just as easily be a response to local, national, or world events that have parenting implications. Keep your eyes on this spot in the final Compass of each month, and if you have any great ideas about future topics, please shoot me an email or text me... or, better yet, kick it old school and give me a call.

Is it Monday, Yet? 8/27

Raising Kids in the Age of Screens... and Merlot

When the news of COVID 19 first hit, Eileen and I still had two kids in high school, one a junior and one a senior. Like many families, we girded our loins and prepared for the worst, counting ourselves fortunate that at least no one we knew was sick. On top of this, Zach did get to play football for his final high school season prior to going off to play on a D1 team, and this would all blow over by the time Ethan got to his senior year, or so we thought. Even our daughter Molly was able to continue captaining her college rowing team, and so during these early days, so it was not all doom and gloom.

In fact, the most challenging part of these early days was learning to take myself off mute before I started speaking, and get used to a whole new way of using words such as "synchronous," "hybrid," and "breakout room." Overnight, Eileen and I went from laying down the law for our kids about losing sleep because of too much screen time… to OUR losing sleep for fear they were not spending ENOUGH time on screens!

If you're raising children who have access to technology at home, it's easy to lose perspective on healthy practices and ways to enforce them according to your family values. When I reflect on my own parenting around technology, red flags that I was losing it, included raising my voice or threatening to remove devices, though I was smart enough not to allow this to impact my relationship with my children, not because I wanted to be their buddy, but because I knew that keeping this connection intact was the best resource I had in what felt like a war between my family and an industry preying on my children.

Although a labor of love, and the best work we will ever do, parenting is not easy. According to Pew Research, "... the widespread adoption of smartphones and the rise of social media has introduced a new wrinkle to the challenges of parenthood. In fact, a majority of parents in the United States (66%) … say that parenting is harder today than it was 20 years ago, with many in this group citing technology as a reason why. Below are some thoughts that I hope will help.

1)   First and foremost, be sure your children know your family's values around the use of technology. They won't always follow these, but they need to hear your voice in their heads, and they will, when they are violating these values when you are not around, and you won't always be.

2)   It's easy to demonize technology, but remember that screens don't hurt users, users hurt users. Like many things in life, technology is not inherently all bad or all good: it's more about how it is used that is either healthy or unhealthy. In this respect, the best we can do for our children is to know how they are using their devices, and to provide boundaries, supervision, encouragement when used properly, and sensible consequences aimed at growth and education when they cross a line.

Parents far more likely to see children's access to smartphones as potentially being more harmful than beneficial

% of U.S. parents who say the following statements most accurately describes how they feel about children who are 11 years old or younger having access to a smartphone

Potential harm outweighs the potential benefits	Potential benefits outweigh the potential harm
71	27

Note: Based on parents who have at least one child under the age of 18 but may also have an adult child or children. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 2-15, 2020.
"Parenting Children in the Age of Screens"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

---

3)   One well intentioned response to the frustration you experience when your children do not listen to you regarding technology use, is to limit their use through filters, alarms, or time limit software. Hear me when I say that you've likely taken twice as much time to research these apps, as they will take to dismantle them or find workarounds! This is, at best, a very temporary and anemic solution. More useful are router reports that tell you where they have been, data that is objective and can inform

conversations with them about how they are using technology (kids are often surprised they have spent so much time on _____ site, so this can be a powerful tool as you hold a mirror up to them and their screen time.
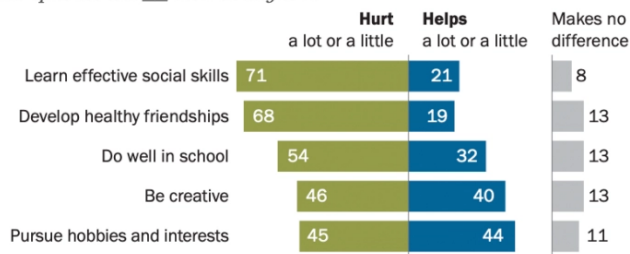
4)   A natural place to go after you realize you've spent a lot of money and time on digital guardrails that have done little but challenge and level up your child's hacking skills, is to pull the plug, literally, on their devices. This is a bad idea for two reasons: a) pulling the plug is very difficult to do now that your kids require more time on their devices for school (and they know it). And even if you could, how would you manage this (it could end up being more difficult for you than for them, like that time you grounded them for life!)? and b) you have missed a teachable moment: pulling the plug when they make a bad decision about technology use, is like removing math from their lives when they get a problem incorrect (OK, a little dramatic, but I think you see where I'm going with this).

5)   A more productive (and sustainable) response would be to move their machine to a public place in the house, torture them with a daily review the router report for their device (linking this performance to the right to return their machine to more of a private place), insist on time spent in non screen activities, or give them the family flip phone for a week (a phone doesn't need to be smart to do the job YOU need it to do, and there are entire industries out there that make alarm clocks and cameras NOT attached to phones). In short, respond by teaching your children to use their devices properly, which is a more natural consequence. So, if a technology line is crossed, don't *pull* it from their lives, but rather *put it in their lives in a more intentional and thoughtful way*. Trust me: they'll be so miserable they'll have plenty of motivation to deliver on your expectations.

6)   It is important to be a good role model for a balanced use of technology, and to help your children know that technology use is a privilege, not a right: since you pay the bills, their phones, tablets, and computers: they're yours. As such, you should know all passwords and have 100% access to their chats and their social media accounts, to visit anytime you'd like, on a whim.

Roughly seven-in-ten parents say smartphones will hurt children's ability to develop healthy friendships, learn social skills

% of U.S. parents who say that children age 11 or younger using smartphones will ___ their ability to ...

	Hurt a lot or a little	Helps a lot or a little	Makes no difference
Learn effective social skills	71	21	8
Develop healthy friendships	68	19	13
Do well in school	54	32	13
Be creative	46	40	13
Pursue hobbies and interests	45	44	11

Note: Based on parents who have at least one child under the age of 18 but may also have an adult child or children. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 2-15, 2020.
"Parenting Children in the Age of Screens"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

7)   Finally, it's OK to say no to technology, or to delay its use until it is a tool that can serve a purpose, according to your needs and your family values. Eileen and I found that when our kids were in 6th grade and traveling on their own through NYC for sports and school, giving them phones was a comfort and a convenience for us, but up until that point, they thought we were the worst parents in the world. Your family will have its own standard to decide when technology is appropriate, and if you need a wingman or a gut check, try [Common Sense Media](), which was a great source of confidence when I thought I might be the only person in the United States depriving my children of their birthright to technology.

Again in reflection on my own parenting, when my voice went to eleven, or when I found myself unplugging anything, it was because I was afraid for my children, which they perceived as anger aimed at them (and how would they know otherwise?). Maybe it's obvious to note it, but I will anyway: educating myself about what they were experiencing helped a lot, and reading more broadly, not just about technology use, but about developmental issues surrounding friendship, the importance of exercise, brain science, AND the value and benefits of technology, also helped a lot… and nice Merlot, if I am being honest.

As you think about teaching balanced use to your children, especially those of you with younger children, it would be important for them to see these devices as necessary for purposeful work, that they see you valuing face to face communication, and that you are an example of how to step away without FOMO, or "fear of missing out": establish "no technology zones" like meals, family time, and family outings. Help them understand the benefits of actual vs. screen based play, and model the health benefits of exercise and community/family membership. At the same time, help them realize the extraordinary benefits of knowing how to use these technologies in a healthy way, and the great resources they can be, if used deliberately and "on purpose" vs. automatically or by default.

These are the values they will fall back on when they are older, and the source of that super annoying voice in their heads, when you are not around!